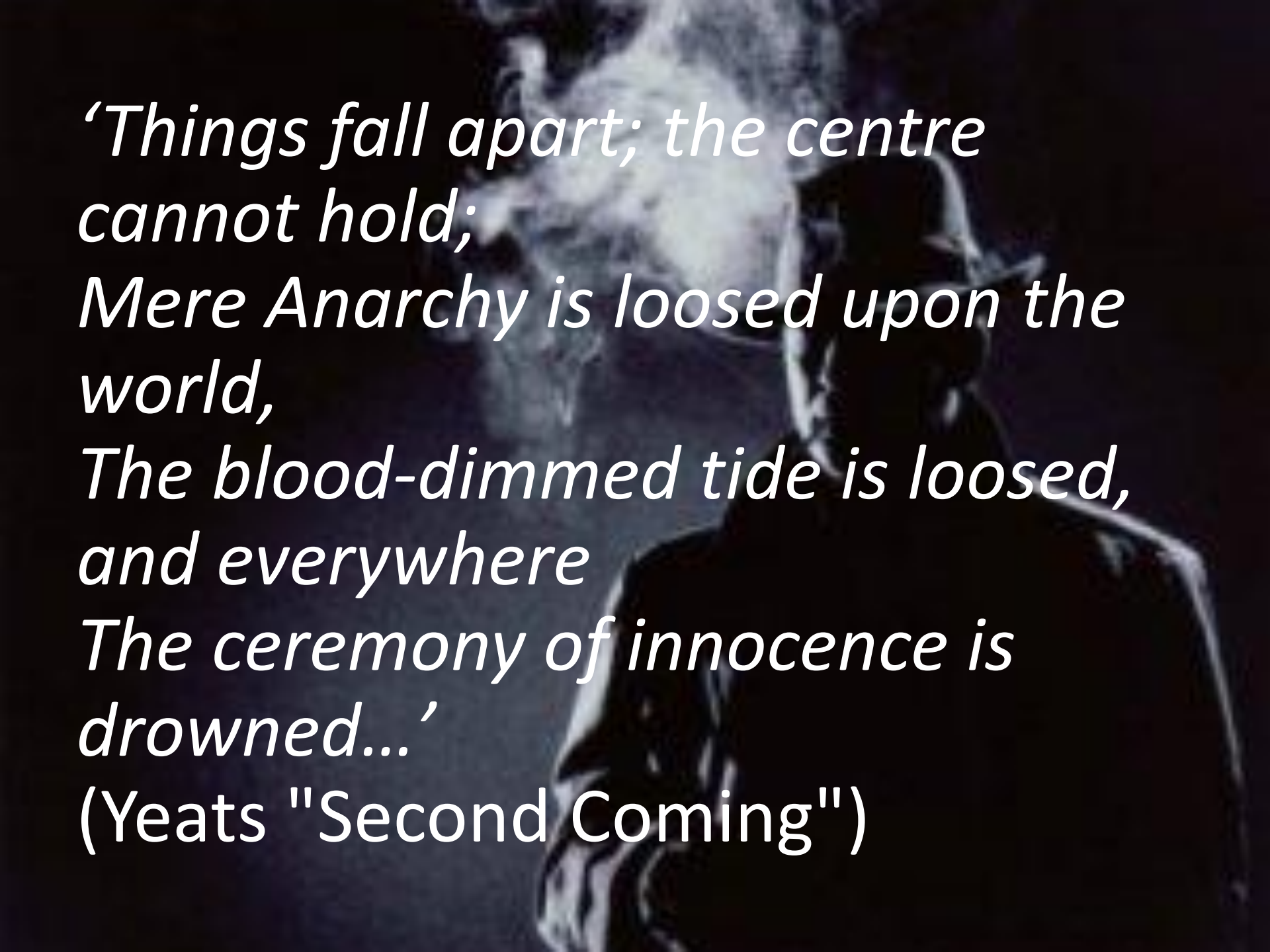


Crime Writing



Genre and the Prescribed Texts
Karen Yager



*'Things fall apart; the centre
cannot hold;
Mere Anarchy is loosed upon the
world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,
and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is
drowned...'*
(Yeats "Second Coming")



Genre as '*situated practice*' (Bakhtin).

Genres “*embody the crucial ideological concerns of the time in which they are popular*” (Fiske, 1987).

The Approach

- 'How **changing contexts and values** have brought about changes in the traditional crime stories and resulted in **new conventions**'
- 'unlimited combinations, **subversions** and **transformations** of the classic 'whodunit' murder mystery'



The Approach

- **Constants and differences**
- Ask why and how
- Genre theory: genres evolve to reflect their times: ideology, values, the stories, technological changes...
- Texts reflect the purpose and perspective of their composer



The Approach

- *'How crime writing has evolved by extending, reimagining and challenging the conventions of the traditional detective story'*
- *'The **crime** and the **investigation**'*
- The medium, form, conventions, plot devices, setting, characters and ideas
- The craft and artistry of writing



The Approach

- The detective is a liminal figure whose gaze has both a witnessing and an ordering power.
- Reflects the social issues or zeitgeist of the time.
- The detective is the agent by which the reader explores the world; through him or her, the setting and characters are filtered and interpreted like a looking-glass.



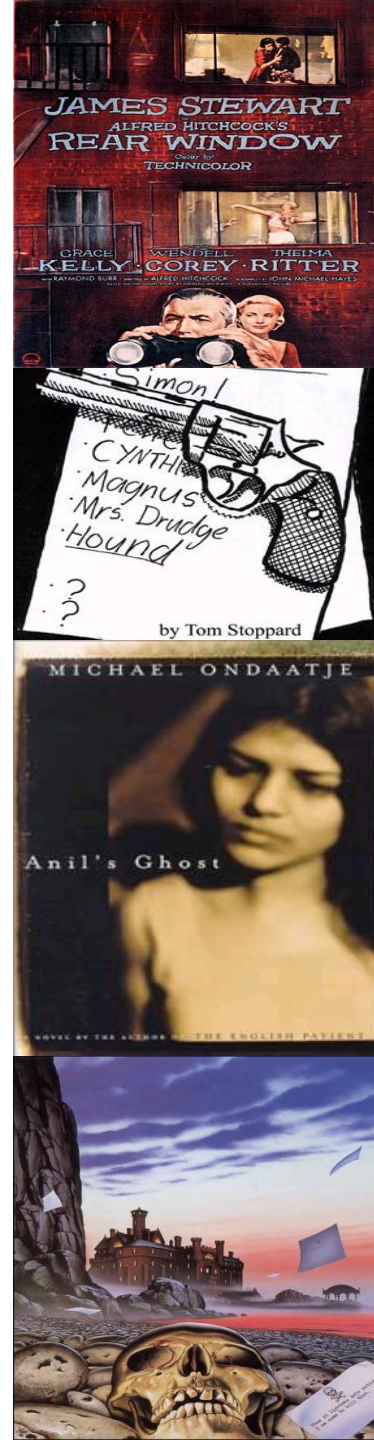
The Approach

- *‘account for the **increasing popularity of different forms** of crime writing while the traditional detective stories continue to **retain their appeal**’*
- Mystery and mayhem
- Chaos and order
- Diversity of crime
- Mediums of production
- Vulnerability and mortality
- Voyeurism



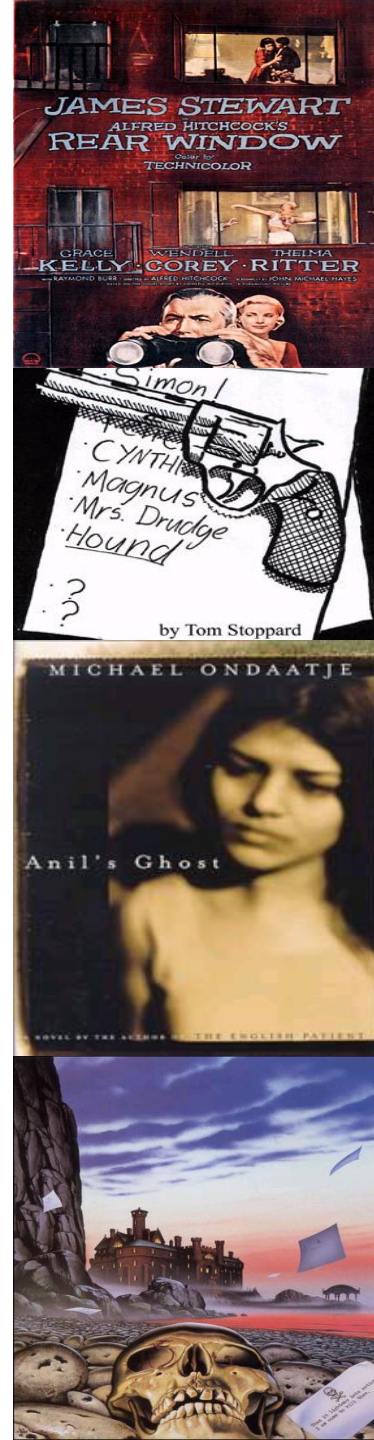
The HSC Examination

- Sustained **thesis or line of argument.**
- **Judicious** textual support:
 - **Detailed and relevant, integrated** references to your prescribed texts and texts of own choosing
 - Key scenes and incidents used to explore constants and differences, plot, ideas, characters, setting and conventions to uncover the meaning through the question.



HSC Examination

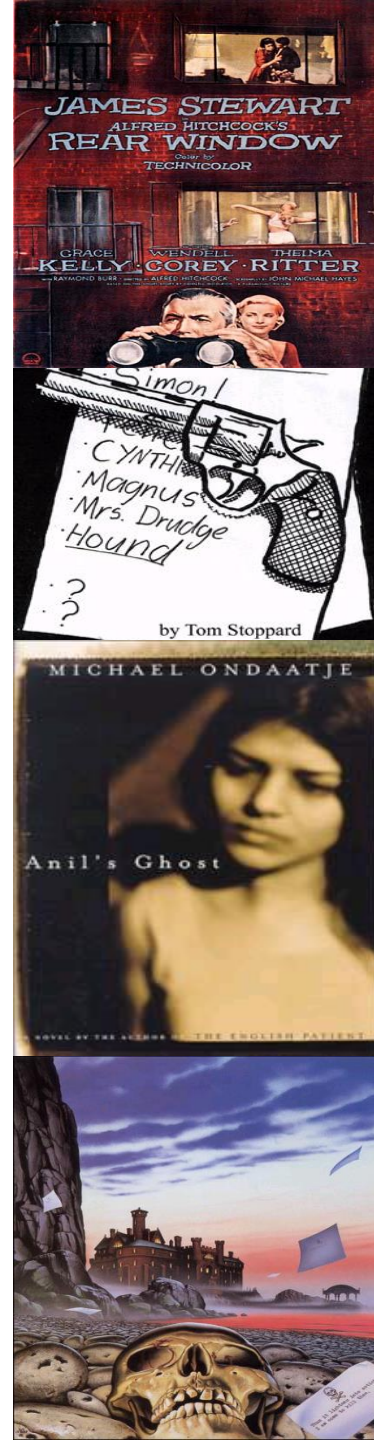
- **Genre theory**, context, values and perspectives
- **Context**: How texts reflect and challenge their times
- **Meaning**: What, why, how and impact
- **Relationships**: Making connections with the texts through the thesis
- **Synthesis**: The ideas and understanding you have gained from your exploration and close study of a range of texts and examination of genre theory.



The Clues

- “effective **integration** of texts to advance the overall **thesis** of the critical response”
- “**synthesis** is greatly valued.”
- “relevant understanding of **literary theory**, historical background and context”
- “insightful awareness and discussion of ‘how’ **ideas, concepts and meaning** are shaped in texts.”
- “a high level of **personal and intellectual engagement** with texts”

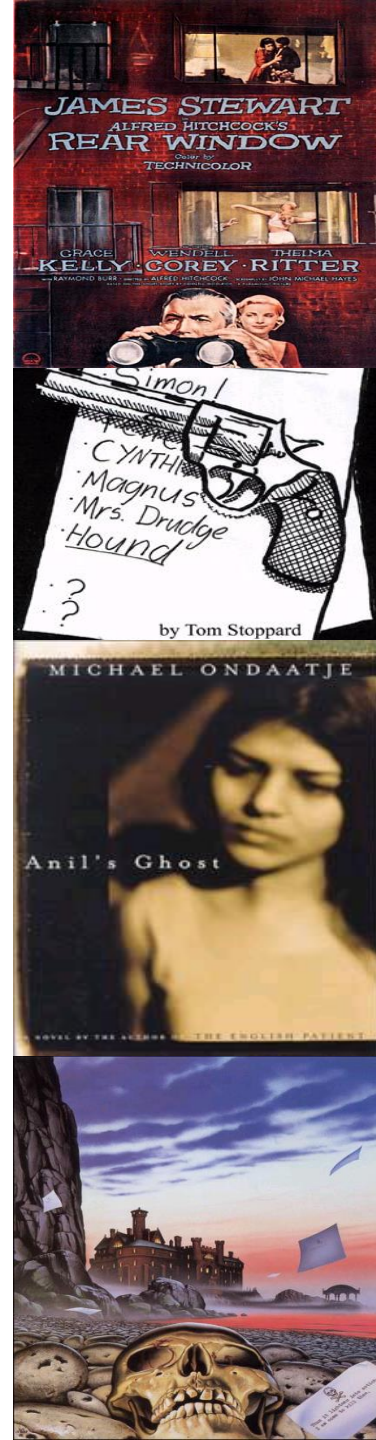
Notes from the Marking Centre



The Clues

- *“Competent answers identified traditions in chosen texts and **asserted differences** between texts as examples of **innovation**.”*
- *“In stronger responses, candidates demonstrated a deep understanding of the genre as an ongoing reflection of society and its relationship with those who transgress its laws. They made connections between their texts and the genre as a whole, rather than the more formulaic treatment of texts in isolation.”*

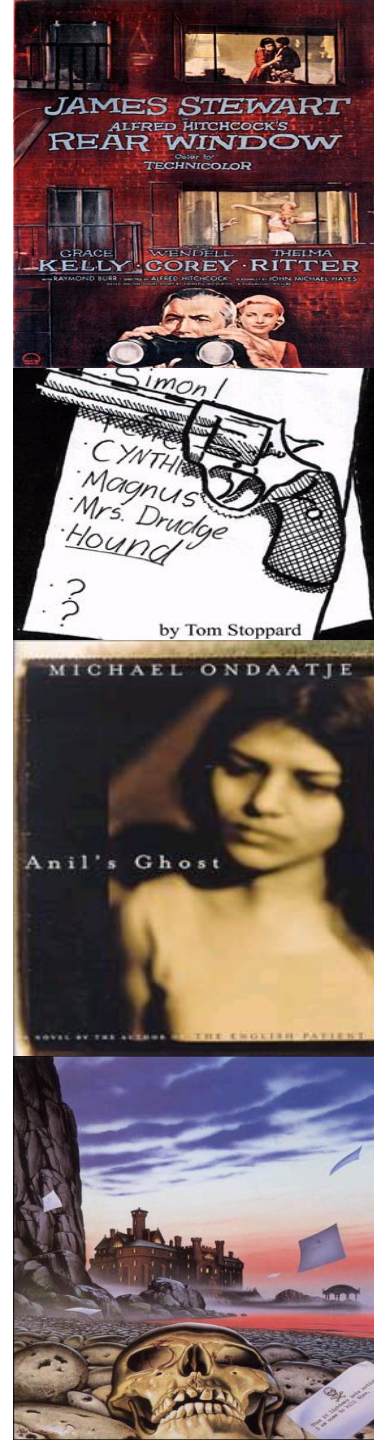
Notes from the Marking Centre



The Marking Rubric

In your answer, you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the **conventions of the genre** and the **ideas and values** associated with the genre
- **sustain** an extended composition **appropriate to the question**, demonstrating control in the use of language.





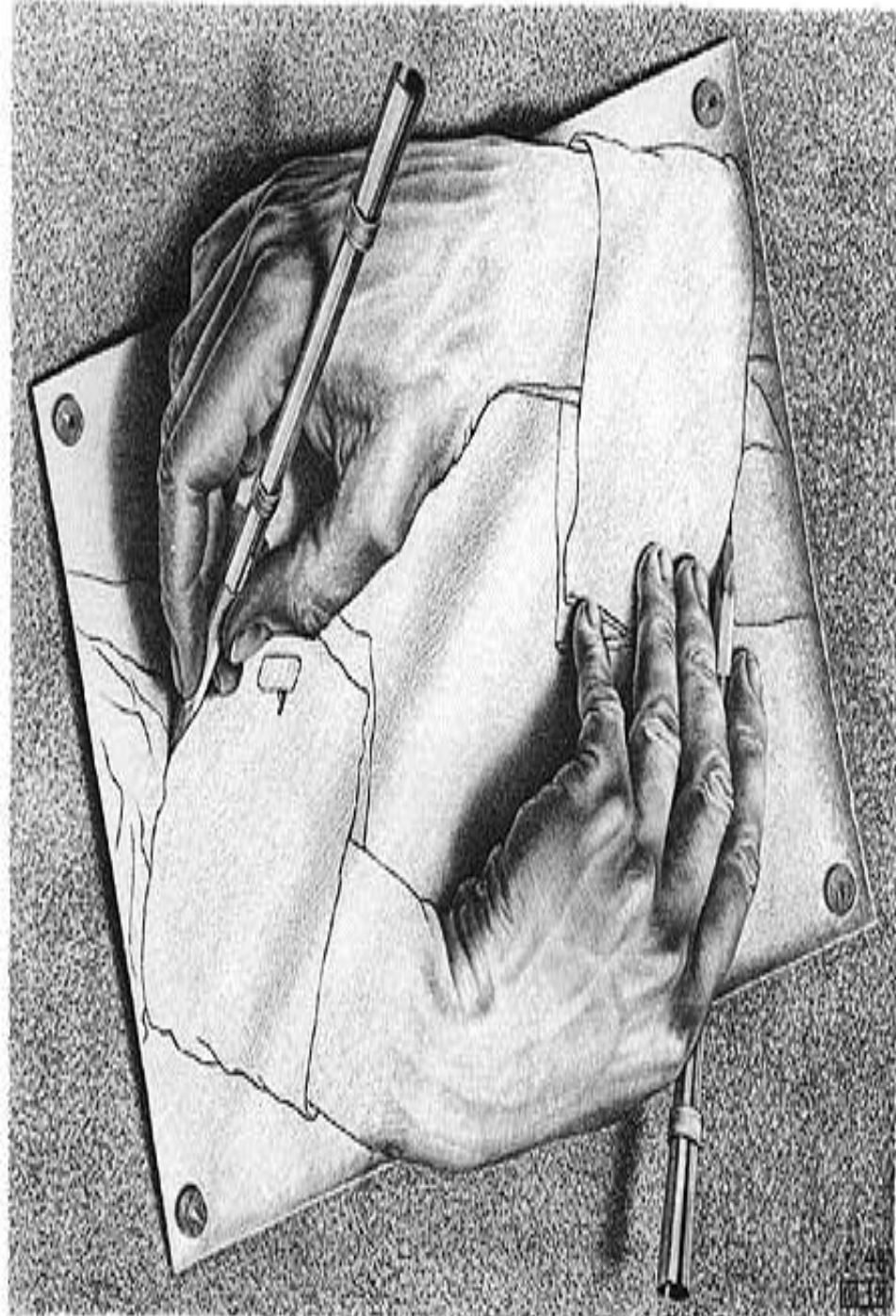
*'Genre theory
is the glue
between the
texts!'*

(Michael
Murray)

**Crime writing is a genre
that is characterised by
the way that it self-
consciously advertises its
own plot elements and
narrative structures.**

Genre Theory

- “genres are **instances of repetition** and difference...**difference** is absolutely essential to the economy of genre” (Neale, 1980).
- “any instance of a genre will be necessarily different” (Todorov).
- “Genres can thus be seen as a kind of shorthand serving to increase the 'efficiency' of communication” (Fowler, 1989).



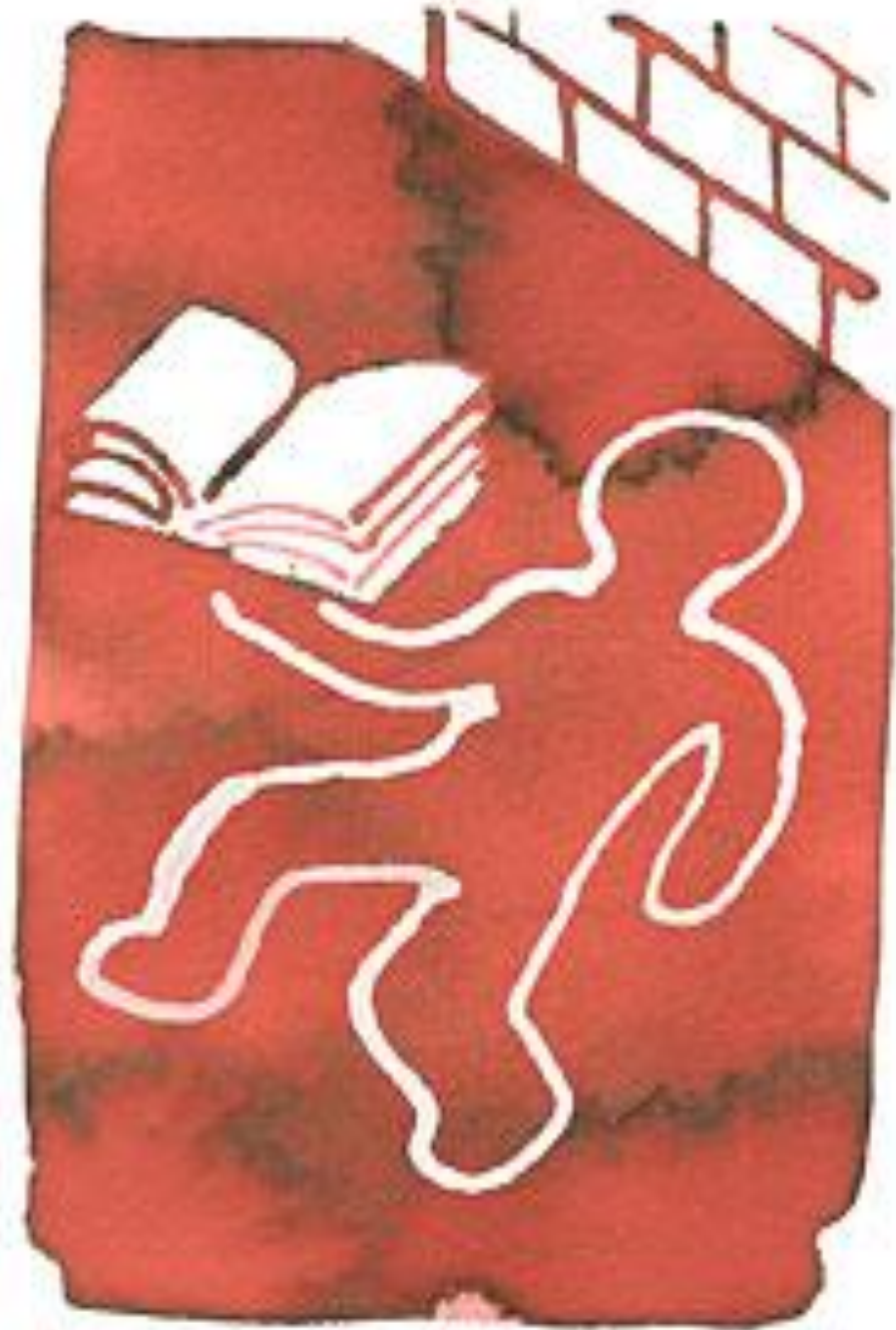
Genre Theory

- *“They rework, extend and transform the norms that codify them”* (Neale, 1990).
- Embryonic to classic (golden) to refinement (parodic and subversive)
- *“genres are about spectator-text relations as well as socio-historic relations”* (Haywood, 2006).



Genre Theory

- *“generically defined structures may operate to construct particular ideologies and values, and to encourage reassuring and conservative interpretations of a given text”* (Casey, 1992).
- *“genre is... an intertextual concept”* (Wales, 1989) – composer encodes and the responder decodes
- *“a means of **constructing** both the audience and the reading subject”* (Fiske, 1987).



Values

- The perspectives and intentions of the composer and his or her times shape the values or beliefs of the text.
- Interrogate the values considering why they are evident in the texts and what they tell you about the composer and the times.
- Recurrent values: truth, integrity, compassion, loyalty, honesty, justice...



Meaning

- *“insightful awareness and discussion of ‘how’ ideas, concepts and meaning are shaped in texts”*
- **How** and **why** the meaning has been crafted and conveyed: the purpose, form, medium of production, textual details and features



A dark, moody image of a hat and shoulders against a red background. The hat is dark and has a wide brim. The shoulders are also dark and appear to be wearing a jacket or coat. The background is a solid, deep red color.

Aberrant Texts

Each text is self-referential and metafictional implicating the responder in the cultural evils it exposes, turning them into voyeurs through their very involvement in the narrative.

A dark, moody image of a hat and shoulders against a red background. The hat is a dark, wide-brimmed style, possibly a fedora or similar, resting on a dark, textured surface. The background is a solid, deep red color. The overall aesthetic is mysterious and dramatic.

Aberrant Texts

Metafiction is generally defined as self-conscious fiction, where the narrative works *‘simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction’* (Waugh). These narratives highlight the textuality of the narrative and engage with the boundaries between reality and fictionality.

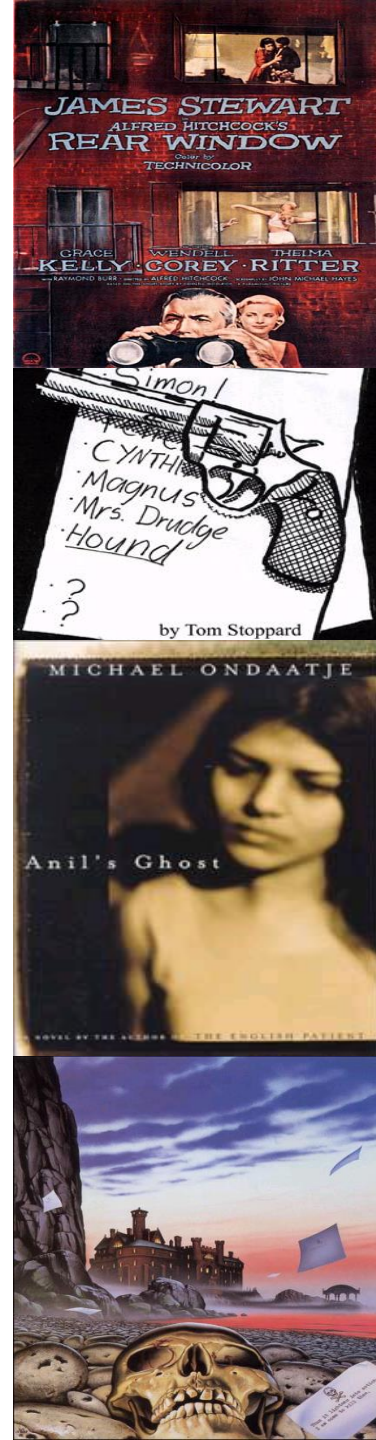
Anil's Ghost

"The new novel hasn't so much raised the bar on the forensic thriller as moved it to another place entirely. He bends and stretches the novel into marvellous shapes, building cathedrals of story, mysterious and grand adventures of the everyday" ([www.Dave Weich.Powells.com](http://www.DaveWeich.Powells.com)).

"Yet the darkest Greek tragedies were innocent compared with what was happening here. Heads on stakes. Skeletons dug out of a cocoa pit in Matale"

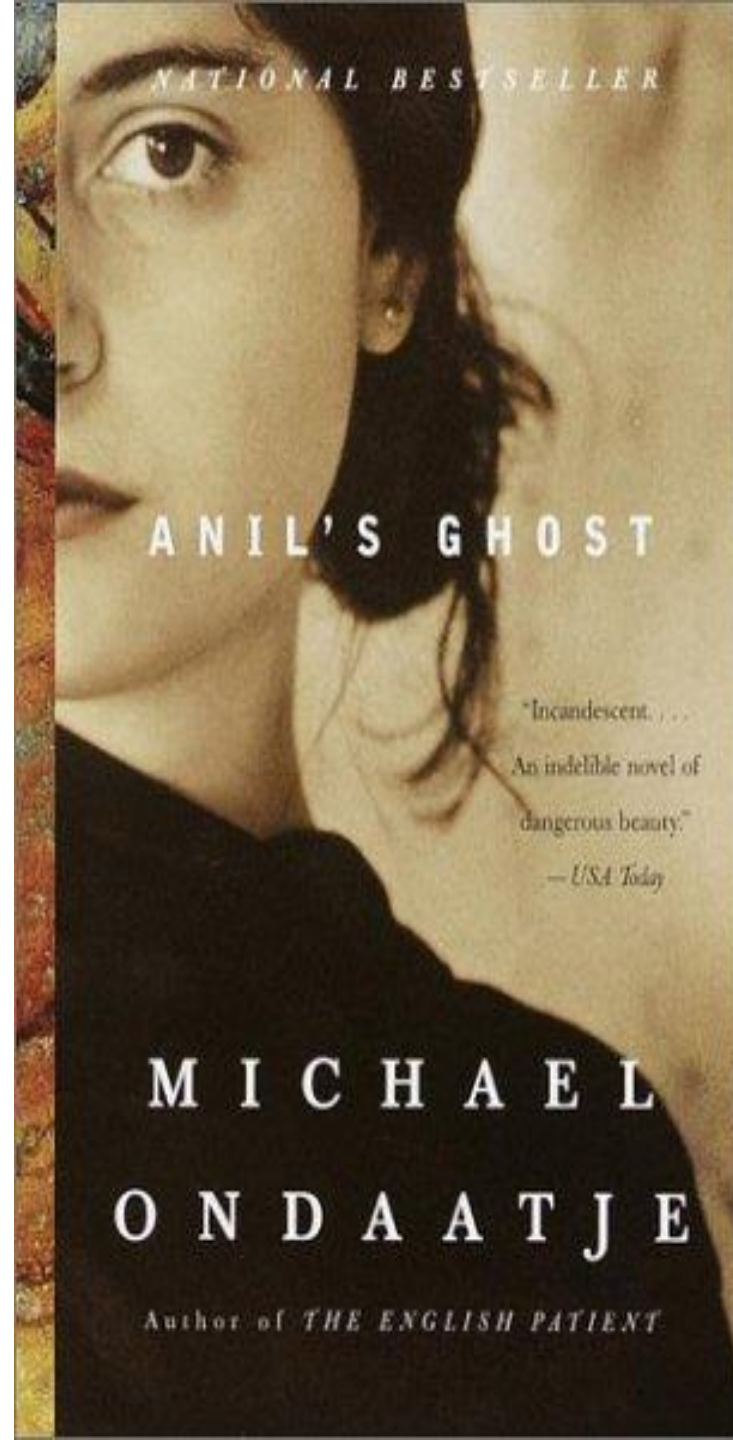
"Some people let their ghosts die, some don't."

"One is no worse and no better than one's enemy."



Anil's Ghost – Form

- Transformation through the focus on lived experience and human frailty rather than the crime.
- A post-modern text that challenges the conventional form of the novel and the crime genre: no closure, vignettes, polyphony of voices...



The Writer

- Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1943. Of Tamil, Sinhalese and Dutch descent – horrified by the violence in such a beautiful setting against a backdrop of Buddhism.
- His mother's gift was her enthusiasm for the arts
- Enigmatic father – *"trying to find the central character...became a habit. In all my books there are mysteries that are not fully told."*
- Rejects fervent ideology



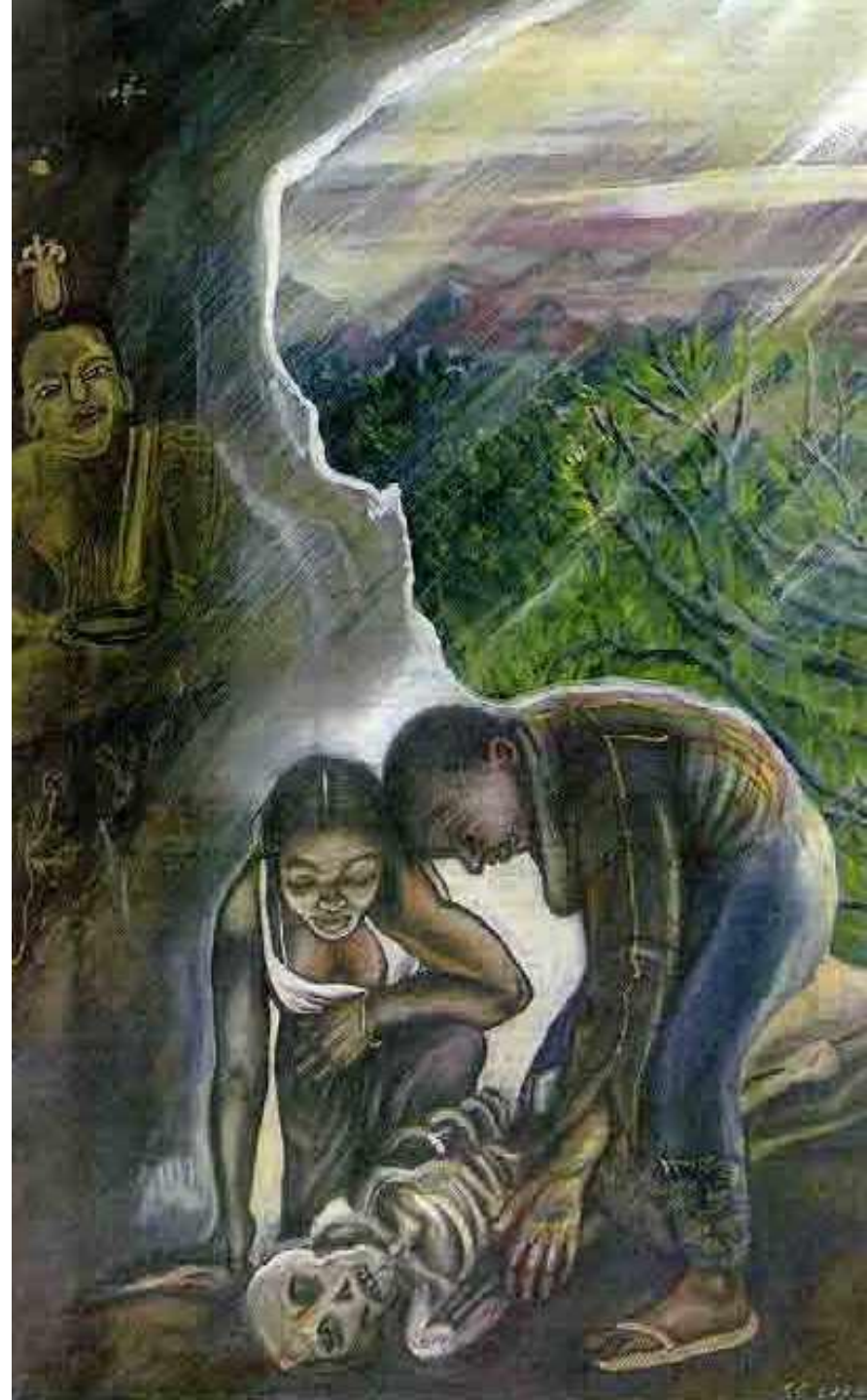
The Crime & Context

- *“I see the world as utterly dangerous, that it’s a very tenuous, accidental world and what you love, especially the people you love, can be swept away in an instant.”*
- A war waged on three fronts by its own people against its own people.
- Anil to focus on one crime: the murder of Sailor - *“representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest”*
- *“Every side was killing and hiding the evidence. Every side...So it’s secret gangs and squads.”*



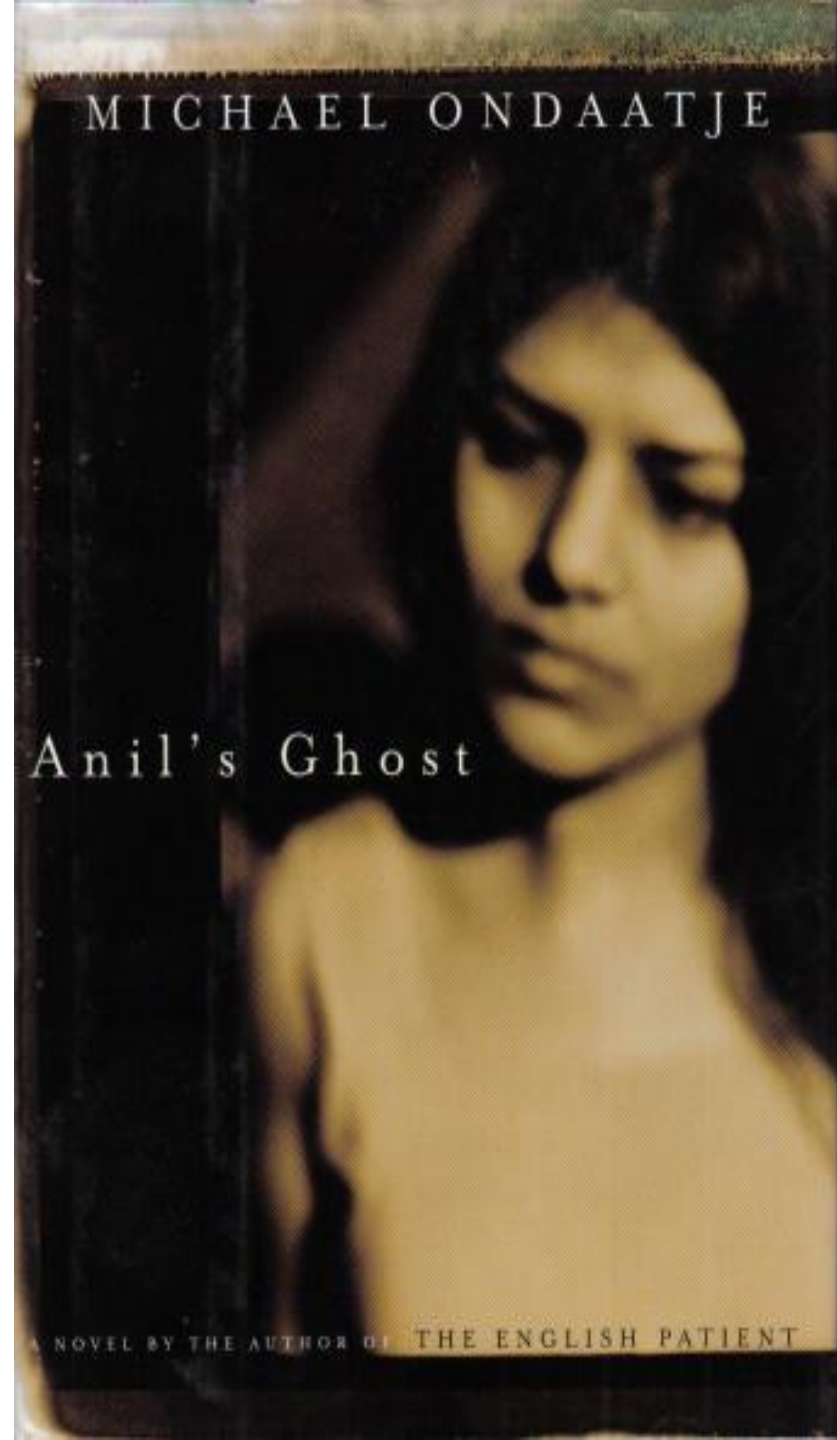
The Investigation

- Investigation of the death of so many Sri Lankans is initiated by an international human rights group.
- Anil and Sarath employ forensic science and art to investigate when and how the murders were committed, and Sailor's identity.
- Thwarted by government officials and those people who do not want the perpetrators exposed.
- Sarath becomes the victim of the drive to silence the stories and stop further investigations.



The Detective

- Anil fits the detective profile: she is a flawed loner - her family is dead, she has discarded a husband and a lover; but she is honorable and determined to uncover the truth and seek justice – *“We use the bone to search for it.” “The truth shall set you free.”*
- Anil is independent, resolute, highly skilled, intelligent and strong, but even she cannot bring to justice the perpetrators of a crime that is too extensive and entrenched.



Constants & Differences

- **The Setting:** Sri Lanka may be a country, but it is isolated by the Government's cone of silence and the west's indifference.
- **Closure:** There is an unexpected ending and no real closure as the crimes will not end. Solace and hope are found in the redemptive powers of art. The reader is warned from the beginning that there will be no justice: *"Nobody at the Centre for Human Rights was very hopeful about it."*; *"I see the poem or the novel ending with an open door."* Ondaatje



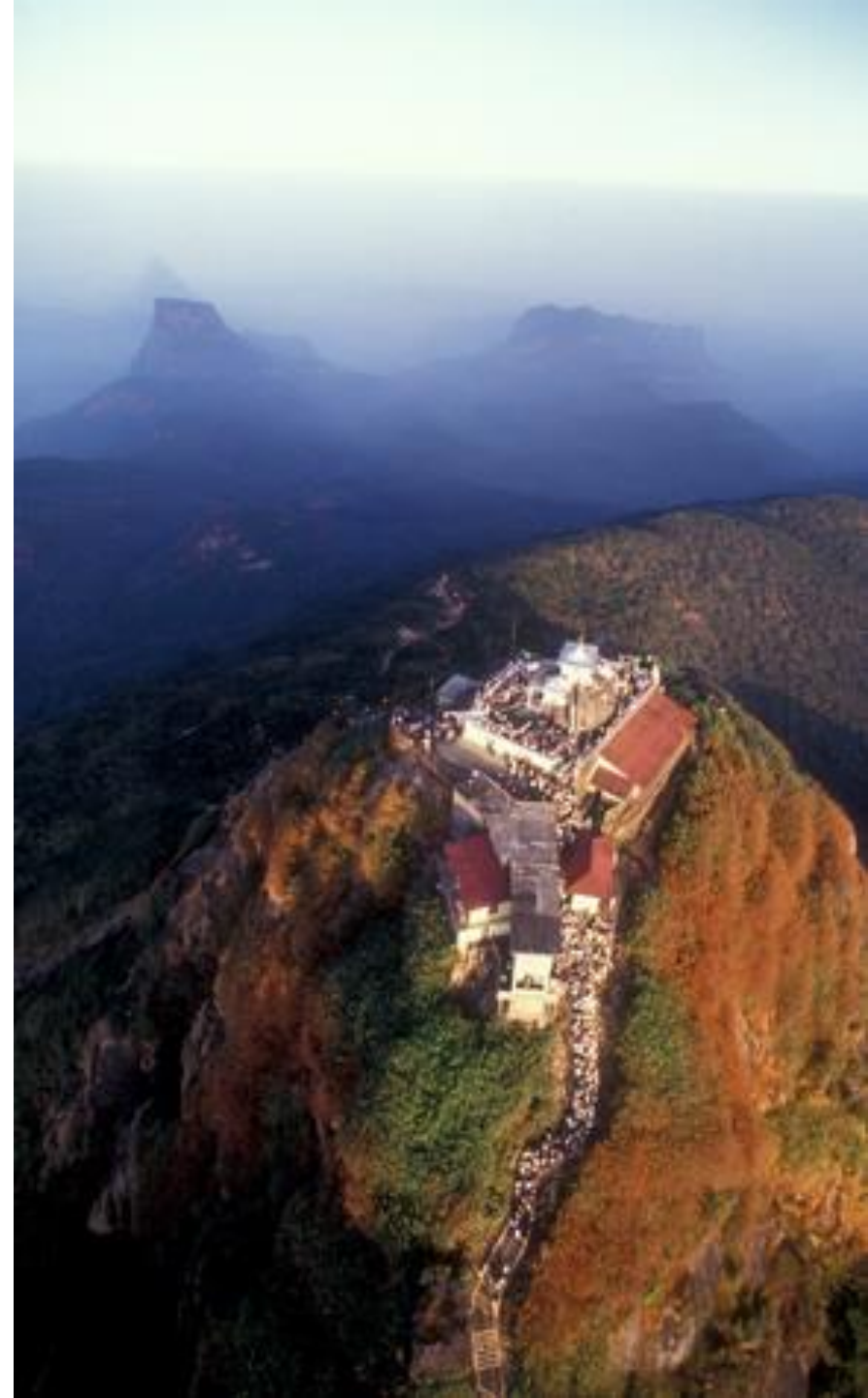
The Ideas

- **Truth:** *“There are various versions of the truth.”* Ondaatje explores public and private truth. Those in power own public truth; it can be shaped, twisted and distorted at will.
- **The power of story telling:** *“...he wanted to tell the story of that place. It would emerge out of this dark trade with the earth.”*
- **Humanity’s inhumanity:** The terrible, senseless internecine crimes are inexplicable – all of humanity is guilty and capable of committing dark crimes - *“We do it to ourselves.”*
- **Apathy and Ignorance:** The West ignored what happened in Sri Lanka, *“That’s enough reality for the West”*



The Ideas

- **Healing power of nature:** The beauty of nature is juxtaposed with the disconcerting images of suffering and death.
- **The value and beauty of art and culture:** Art is a redemptive act that symbolises the wonder and skill of humanity – *“not just a culture of death, it’s an intricate, subtle, and artistic culture. I wanted to celebrate it.”*
- **Danger of Ideology:** Gamini as a doctor who has spent countless hours trying to save lives, is cynically aware of the terrible consequences of strong ideology when people believe what they are doing is right and that war justifies the end result.



The Values

- Ondaatje rejects the war and aggression as he is disturbed by its impact on the lives of the innocent people who are ignored by nations. Their voices have been silenced and they have chosen passive acceptance so try to survive. He has stated that his core values are reconciliation, compassion and forgiveness. These are the values of a pacifist who rejects ardent ideology and the abuse of power.
- **Truth:** *“Truth sometimes can be, you know, as dangerous as falseness.”*



The Values

- **Pacifism:** Acts of violence are viewed by Ondaatje as destructive and dehumanising for all players - *“It is much more difficult to be a pacifist than it is to be a man of action...Pacifism, reconciliation, forgiveness are easily mocked and dismissed words. But only those principles will save us.”*
- **Compassion:** Caring for others is paramount in this novel. The doctors despite hardship and danger stay to help the victims of war. Gamini works long, arduous hours to ease suffering and save lives.



The Craft

- **Poetic, lyrical and suggestive**
- **Polyphony:** *“You cannot rely on just Anil to tell the truth, or just Gamini, or just Sarath, or just Palipana, or just Ananda, or whoever it is, to have the only voice.”*
- **Gaps, silences and understatements – the vignettes:** *“The colour of a shirt. The sarong’s pattern. The hour of disappearance”*
- **Self-reflexivity:** Intrudes with political statements and insightful observations of life, art and people, often through Gamini - *“Who sent a thirteen-year old to fight, and for what furious cause? For an old leader? For some pale flag?”*



The Craft

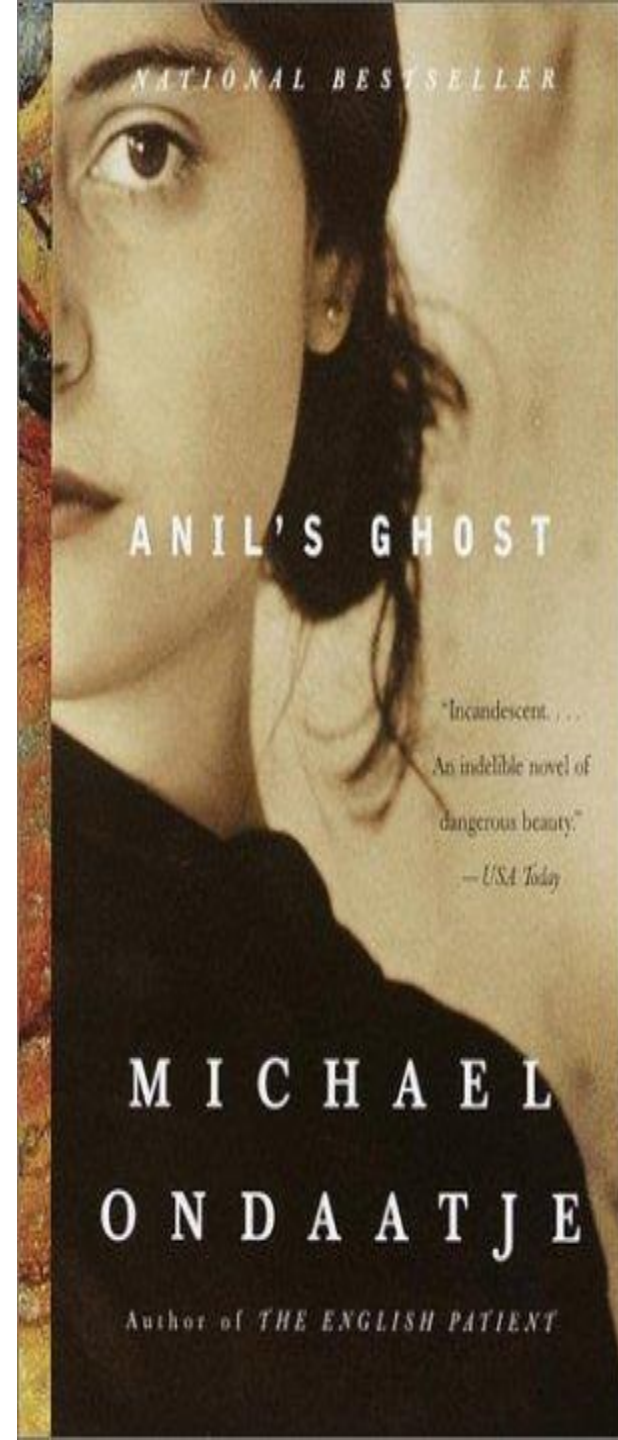
- Structure is chaotic and non-linear and cinematic, employing flashbacks, jump cuts form one scene to another, fractured sentences – “*You can't enter my novel with any sureness of where you are going to go.*”
- Use of intertextuality, historical facts and actual place names adds authenticity further evoking horror.



Anil's Ghost - Thesis

The detective in crime writing offers hope that justice and truth will prevail.

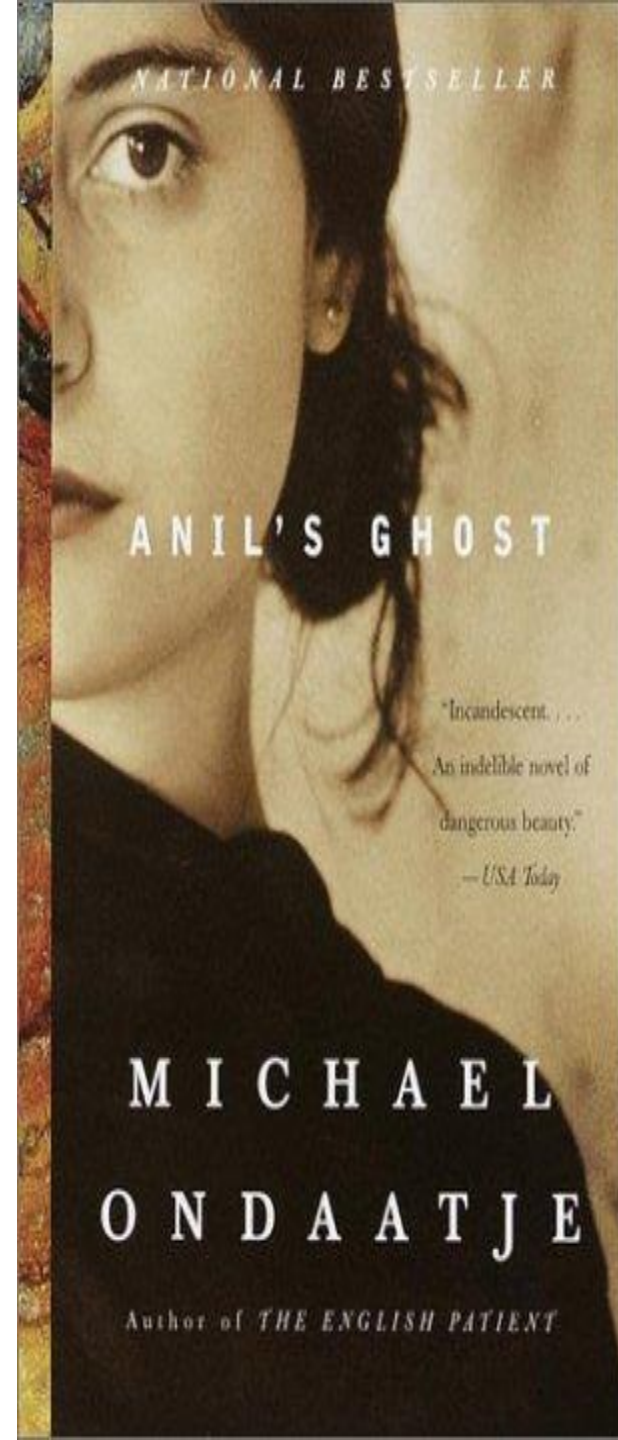
- *"We use the bone to search for it. 'The truth shall set you free.' I believe that." Anil searches for truth but she cannot bring to justice the perpetrators of a crime that is unstoppable. "Every side was killing and hiding the evidence."*
- Sarath challenges Anil's relentless pursuit: *"The truth can be like a flame against a lake of petrol."*
- Palipana: *"Most of the time in our world, truth is just opinion."*



Anil's Ghost - Thesis

Crime writing's increasing popularity can be attributed to its exploration of the dark side of humanity and our increasing vulnerability.

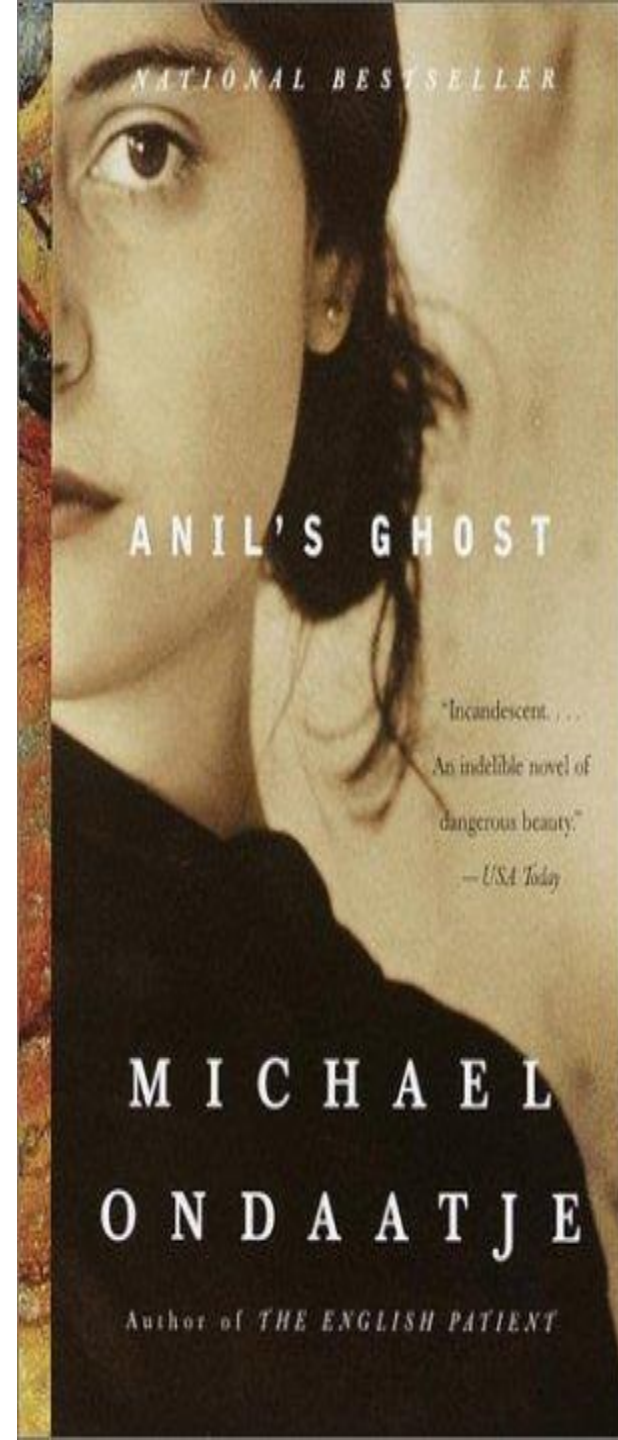
- All of humanity is guilty and capable of committing dark crimes. *"We do it to ourselves."* (p. 140)
- *"Every side was killing and hiding the evidence. Every side...So it's secret gangs and squads."* (p. 17) Everyone to some extent is guilty whether it is through killing, indifference or silence, *"Now we all have blood on our clothes."* (p. 48)
- *"Yet the darkest Greek tragedies were innocent compared with what was happening here. Heads on stakes. Skeletons dug out of a cocoa pit in Matale"* (p. 11).



Anil's Ghost - Thesis

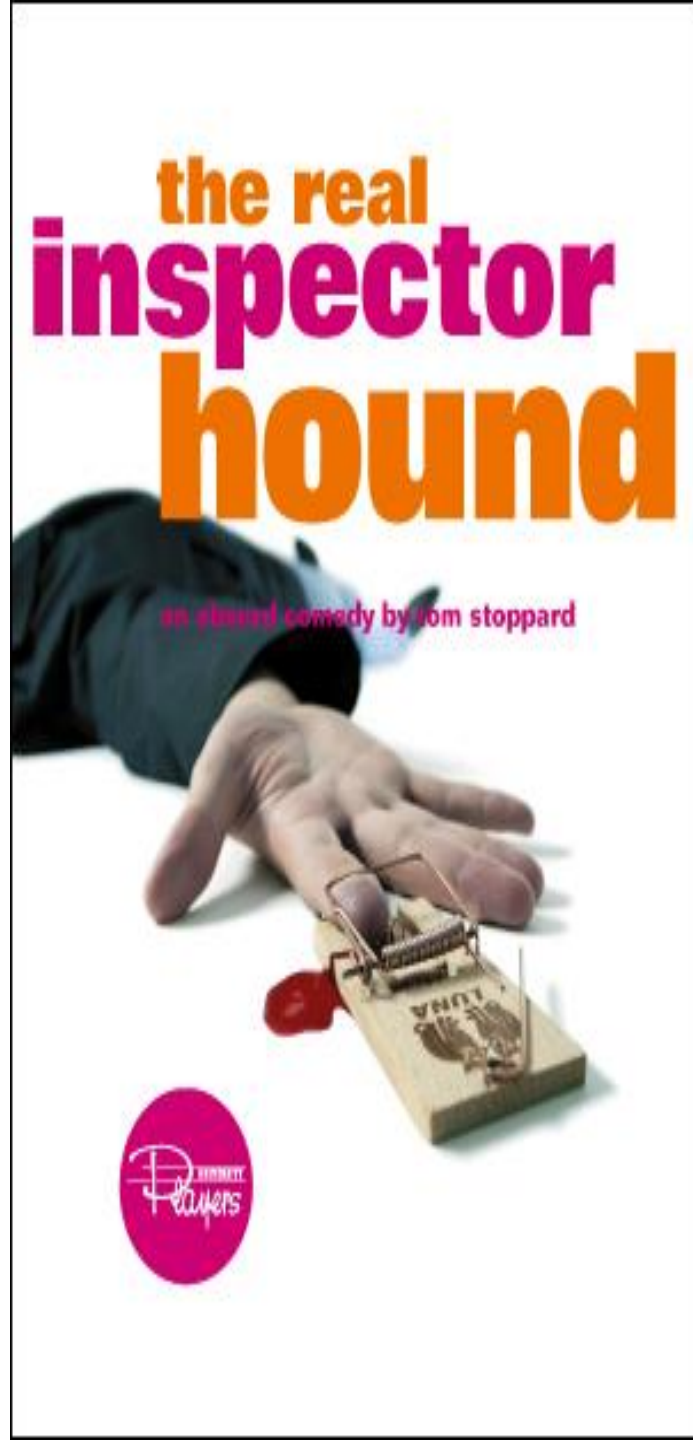
The currency and realism of crime writing makes it the ideal vehicle to challenge our way of thinking about society and humanity.

- Ondaatje challenges fervent ideology.
- *"He turned away from every person who stood up for a war. Or the principle of one's land, or pride or ownership, or even personal rights. All of those motives ended up somehow in the arms of careless power. One was no better no worse than the enemy."* (p. 119)
- *"The way the terrorists in our time can be made to believe they are eternal if they die fighting for the cause of their ruler."* (p. 261)



The Real Inspector Hound

- As *The Real Inspector Hound* is a refinement text it is able to successfully parody established and well known conventions of the crime fiction genre – the British cosy.
- “...the author has taken the trouble to learn from the masters of the genre. He has created a real situation, and few will doubt his ability to resolve it with a startling denouement. Certainly that is what it so far lacks, but it has a beginning, a middle and I have no doubt it will prove to have an end.”
(*Birdboot* p. 31)



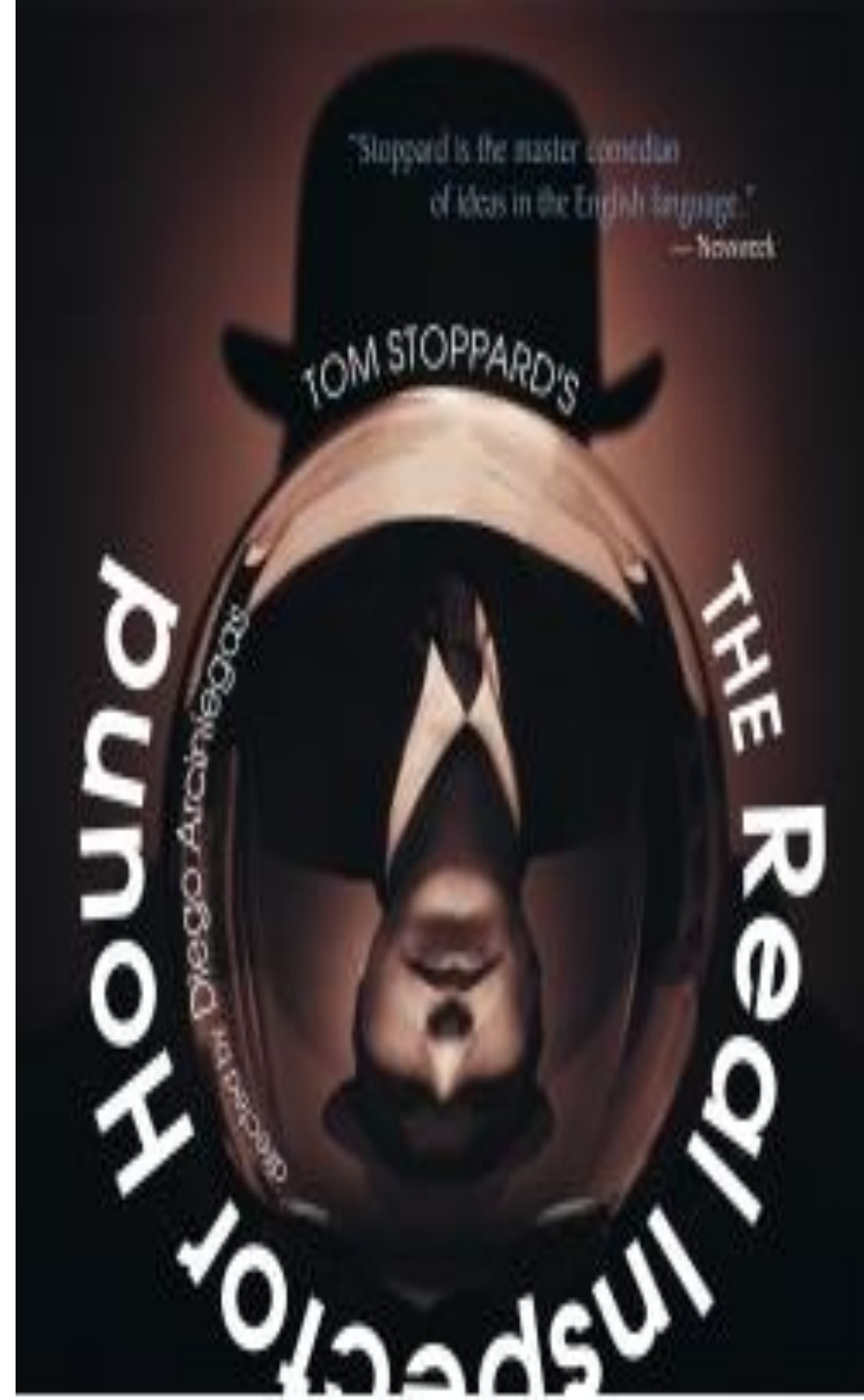
The Form

- *"It's a whodunit, man!"*
- *"Parody is repetition, but repetition that includes difference. It is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways"*
(Linda Hutcheon, 1985)
- Post-modern, playful parody of the Golden Age cosy confronts us with the clichéd conventions and stereotypical characters of the genre.



The Form

- *“Dislocation of an audience’s assumptions is an important part of what I like to write”* (Stoppard).
- Use of the mirror, the explicit stage directions and the elimination of the fourth wall



The Writer

- “*Prufrock* (a poem by Eliot) and *Beckett* are the twin syringes of my diet, my arterial system.”
- Influenced by the Absurdist
- Postmodernist who rejects ideology
- Between 1962-1963 he worked as a theatre critic in London for *Scene* magazine under the by-line William Boot



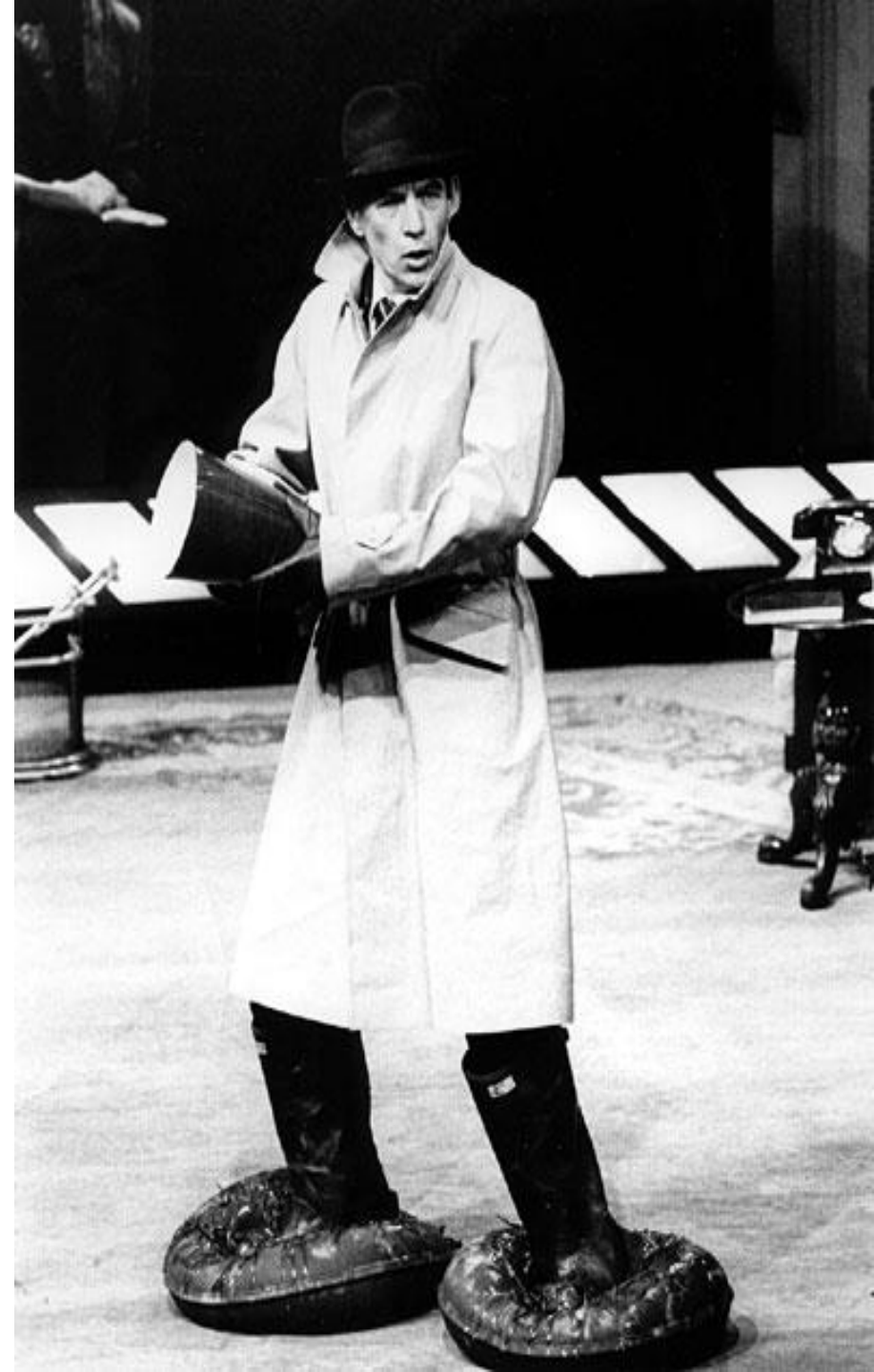
Crime and Context

- Stoppard aware of the popularity and longevity of Christie's play, playfully questions its place in a chaotic modern world in the midst of the futile Vietnam War in the late 1960's
- A number of guests who were all revealed as having a motive to commit the crime - *"One of us ordinary mortals thrown together by fate and the elements, is the murderer!"*



The Investigation & the Detective

- Title with its emphasis on 'real', questions from the start the role of the detective.
- The absence of a detective subverts and mocks the conventions of the British cosy that relied on the detective to restore order and ensure that there is justice.
- In the world of the 1960's with the Vietnam War and political unrest, the world is not rational – “*something is rotten*” (Moon)



Constants & Differences

- **Conventions:** Parodic and intertextual
- **Setting:** Isolated but a setting within a setting
- **Crime:** A murder has already been committed but what is the crime?
- **Closure:** Does occur but there is no justice



Ideas

- **Wish fulfilment:** Stoppard playfully exposes the dangers of pursuing our deepest desires and wishes. Moon's envy and desire to be the main theatre critic are exaggerated in the play, *"Sometimes I dream that I killed him."* Ironically his desires are ruthlessly pursued by his third stinger Puckeridge who realises his ambitions through murder: *"Puckeridge...you cunning bastard."*
- **Hypocrisy:** Birdboot justifies his affairs with the actresses, and boasts about his ability to launch the career of an actress.



Values

- **Integrity and Honesty:**
Neither the characters or the critics reveal integrity.
- **Truth and Honesty:**
Stoppard satirises reality and truth. The Absurdist banter of the characters on stage is spurious, egocentric and superficial.



Craft

- Entertaining, melodramatic parody of the popular and very familiar British cosy.
- *“Parody is repetition, but repetition that includes difference. It is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways”* (Linda Hutcheon).
- Refinement of the genre enables writers like Stoppard to play with the conventions.



Craft

- Employs the stock features of melodrama: slapstick humour, hyperbole, stereotypical characters and double entendre to effectively mock the conventions of the cosy
- Play within a play and the mirror - *“Dislocation of an audience’s assumptions is an important part of what I like to write.”*



The Real Inspector Hound - Thesis

Subversive texts challenge the dominant ideological discourse.

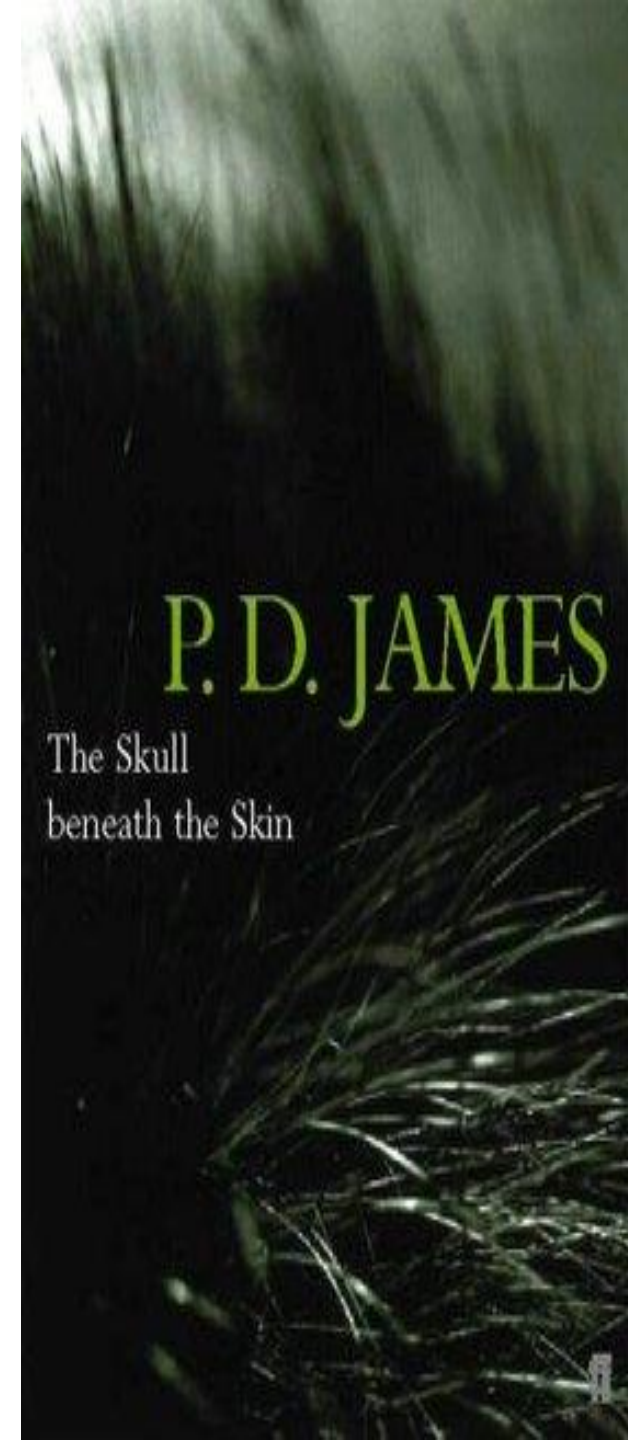
- The play relies on the audience's prior knowledge of a cosy: the isolated setting, the usual suspects, the red herrings; however, the parody challenges the audience's assumptions about the genre.
- The play takes the traditional cosy and hammers it with melodrama and slapstick humour; however, Stoppard fails to realise that the success of Christie's play lies in its use of light-hearted parody.



The Skull Beneath the Skin

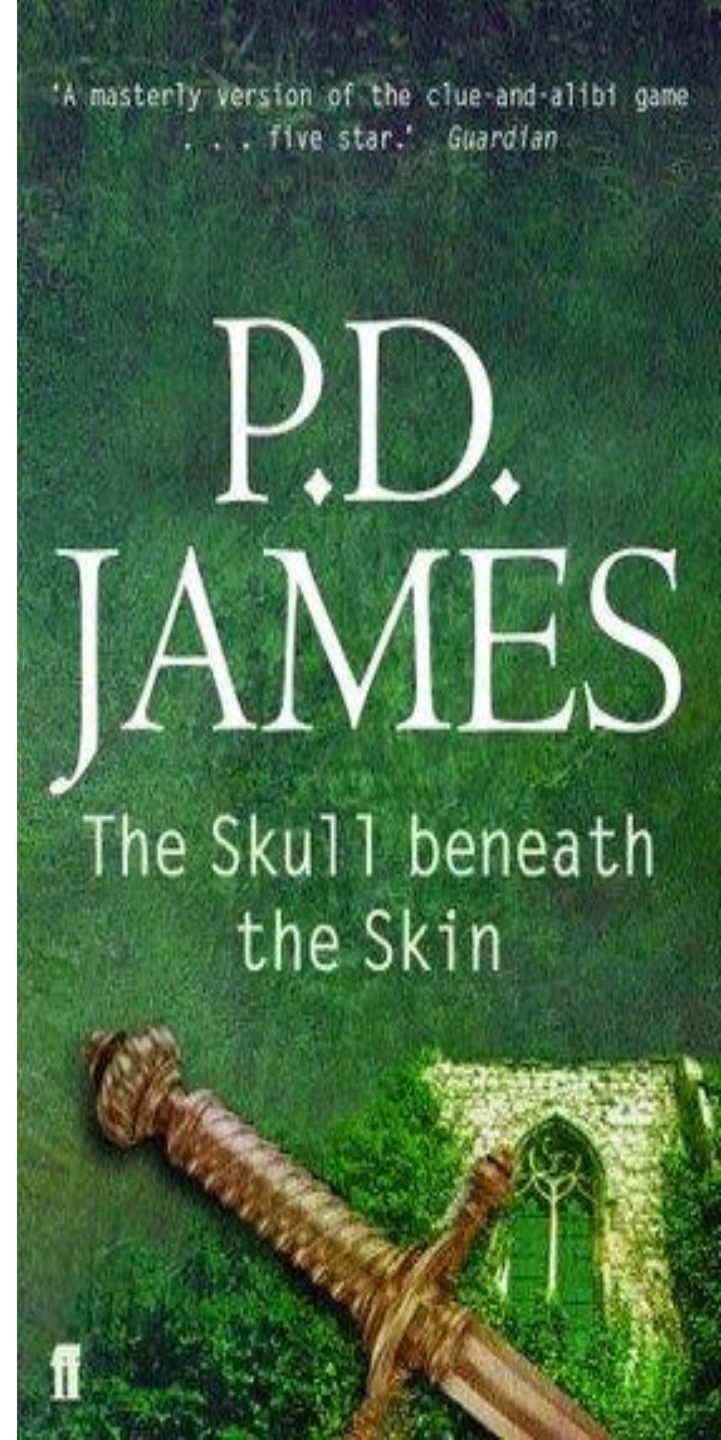
"I think that's one of the attractions of the genre, that it does bring order out of disorder...It affirms the sanctity of life, however unpleasant that character may be, and it confirms our belief that we live in a moral and compassionate universe. And that we can have some justice, even if it is the imperfect justice of men" P.D. James.

- Draws on the cosy puzzle littered the pages of the novel with various clues and red herrings for the reader to discover the identity of the murderer before Cordelia solves the mystery.
- Like Stoppard, James mocks the cosy's clichés and melodrama.



The Form

- P.D.James has created a hybrid crime fiction novel that blends the conventions of gothic horror and the cosy.
- She metafictionally mocks the crime genre - *“It sounds like the chapter heading for one of those thirties snobbish thrillers”*



Writer

- Context of the early 1980's: Loss of faith in leadership and Thatcher's respect for Victorian values
- P.D. James is attracted to the detective story by *"the catharsis of carefully controlled terror, the bringing of order out of disorder, the reassurance that we live in a comprehensible and moral universe and that, although we may not achieve justice, we can at least achieve an explanation and a solution."*



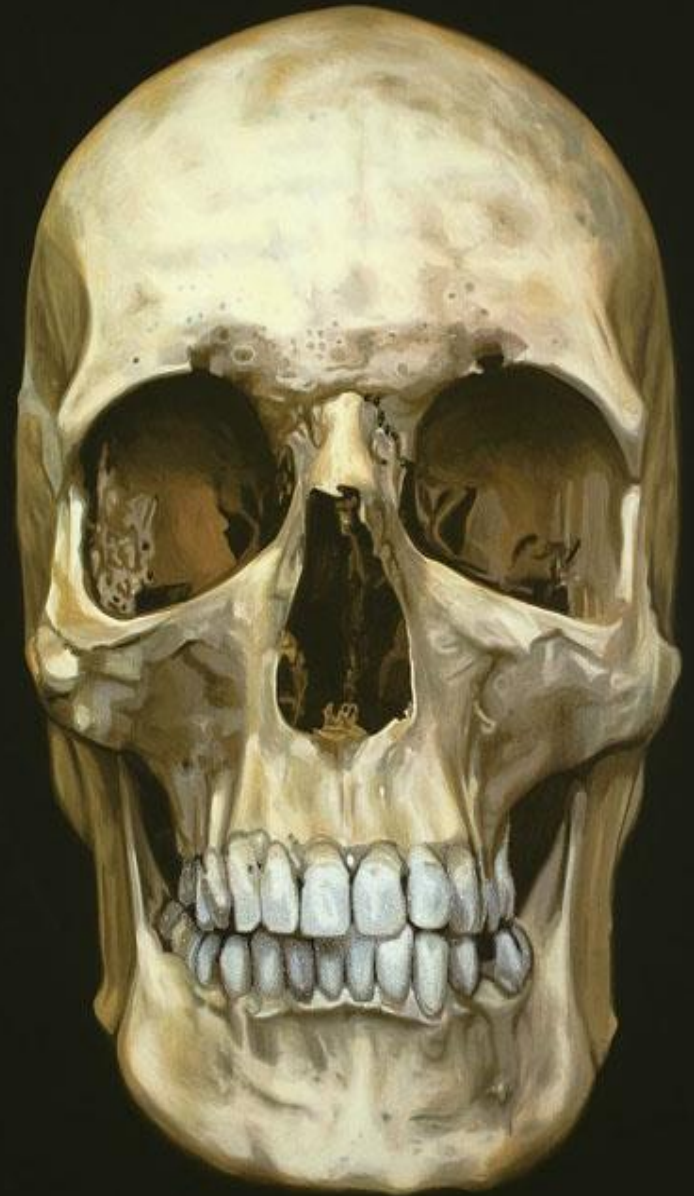
The Detective

- P.D. James has crafted an inexperienced and vulnerable detective in Cordelia Gray - *“How sweet she was, with that gentle, self-contained dignity”*
- Her character is sacrificed to the plot.
- She is alone like Anil and Jeff with an uneasy past – she was placed in foster care by her Marxist father - *“She guarded her privacy”*
- Her innocence and strong sense of justice and integrity mark her as an outsider in a corrupt and tainted world - *“I can’t believe that a human being could be so evil.”*



Ideas

- **Evil:** Cordelia is shocked by the dark side of humanity that is capable of so much evil and deceit.
- **Fear of Death:** The title signifies our mortality and our fear of death. Clarissa continually focuses on dying, Ivo is dying from cancer, and Gorringe morbidly satisfies his fascination by surrounding himself with artefacts of death – *“There never was a time when I didn’t see the skull beneath the skin.”*



Values

- **Justice:** James asserts that murder is never justifiable; however, Ambrose is not brought to justice: *“It affirms the sanctity of life, however unpleasant that character may be, and it confirms our belief that we live in a moral and compassionate universe. And that we can have some justice, even if it is the imperfect justice of men”*
- **Altruism:** Despite running a struggling agency she continues to employ misfit characters. Her selflessness is juxtaposed with Clarissa’s egocentric, uncaring attitude and behaviour.



Craft

- The isolated setting with the Victorian mansion that has gothic features marries the two genres in this hybrid text – *“Setting, important in any work of fiction ...It establishes atmosphere, influences plot and character and enhances the horror of murder, sometimes by contrast between the beauty and outward peace of the scene and the turbulence of human emotions.”*
- Characters are very deliberately drawn with detail - *“The characters should be real human beings, each of whom comes alive for the reader, not pasteboard people to be knocked down in the final chapter.”*

P. D. JAMES

The Skull
beneath the Skin

The Skull Beneath the Skin - Thesis

The continued popularity of the crime writing has been assured by the emergence of subversions.

- *"I've tried to use the well-worn conventions of the mystery and subvert them, stretch them, use them to say something true about my characters, about men and women and the society in which they live" P.D. James.*
- The detective Cordelia Gray has an uneasy past and she lacks the intellectual capacity of the traditional cosy detective.
- The isolated setting at Sir Ambrose Gorringe's Victorian castle is a convention of the cozy but the blending of the cozy with the gothic genre is a subversion: *"It stood on the edge of the sea, almost as if it had risen from the waves, a castle of rose-red brick..."* (p. 69).

The book cover features a dark, moody photograph of tall grass or reeds, possibly at night or in low light, creating a sense of mystery and suspense. The author's name is prominently displayed in a large, serif font, and the title is in a smaller, elegant font below it.

P.D. JAMES

The Skull
beneath the Skin

The Skull Beneath the Skin - Thesis

The continued popularity of the genre has been assured by the emergence of subversions.

- Parody and self-reflexivity: James mocks the cozy genre: “We are all here together, the of us on this small and lonely island. And one of us is a murderer.” “Reviewing Agatha Christie at the Vaudeville is a poor preparation for the real thing.”

The image shows the front cover of the book 'The Skull Beneath the Skin' by P.D. James. The background is a dark, moody photograph of tall grass or reeds, possibly in a marsh or near water, with some light reflecting off the blades. The author's name 'P.D. JAMES' is printed in a large, green, serif font. Below it, the title 'The Skull beneath the Skin' is written in a smaller, white, serif font.

P.D. JAMES
The Skull
beneath the Skin

The Skull Beneath the Skin - Thesis

One of the key attractions of crime writing is humanity's obsession with mortality. Like all genres, it reflects the ideological concerns of its times.

- The title signifies our mortality and our fear of death: Clarissa: *"I don't remember when it began, but I knew the facts of death before I knew the facts of life. There never was a time when I didn't see the skull beneath the skin."*
- *"But in all societies there was an atavistic fear of the malevolent power of a secret adversary, working for evil, willing one to failure, perhaps to death"* (p. 60).
- Clarissa continually focuses on dying, Ivo is dying from cancer, and Gorringer morbidly satisfies his fascination by surrounding himself with artefacts of death. *"It's my death I'm afraid of"* (Clarissa, p. 123).

The book cover features a dark, moody photograph of tall grass or reeds, possibly in a field or near water, with a soft, ethereal light filtering through. The author's name, P.D. JAMES, is printed in a large, serif font in a light green or yellowish color. Below it, the title 'The Skull beneath the Skin' is written in a smaller, white serif font.

P.D. JAMES

The Skull
beneath the Skin